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Islam in China: Accommodation or Separatism?

Dru C. Gladney

ABSTRACT Many of the challenges China's Muslims confront remain the same as they have for the last 1,400 years of continuous interaction with Chinese society, but some are new as a result of China's transformed and increasingly globalized society, and especially since the watershed events of the 11 September terrorist attacks and the subsequent "war on terrorism." Muslims in China live as minority communities, but many such communities have survived in rather inhospitable circumstances for over a millennium. This article examines Islam and Muslim minority identity in China, not only because it is where this author has conducted most of his research, but also because with the largest Muslim minority in East Asia, China's Muslims are clearly the most threatened in terms of self-preservation and Islamic identity. I argue that successful Muslim accommodation to minority status in China can be seen to be a measure of the extent to which Muslim groups allow the reconciliation of the dictates of Islamic culture to their host culture. This goes against the opposite view that can be found in the writings of some analysts, that Islam in the region is almost unavoidably rebellious and that Muslims as minorities are inherently problematic to a non-Muslim state. The history of Islam in China suggests that both within each Muslim community, as well as between Muslim nationalities, there are many alternatives to either complete accommodation or separatism.

China's Muslims are in the midst of the first decade of their second millennium under Chinese rule. Many of the challenges they confront remain the same as they have for the last 1,400 years of continuous interaction with Chinese society, but some are new as a result of China's transformed and increasingly globalized society, and especially the watershed events of the 11 September terrorist attacks and the subsequent "war on terrorism." Muslims in China live as minority communities amid a sea of people, in their view, who are largely pork-eating, polytheist, secularist and kafir ("heathen"). Nevertheless, many of their small and isolated communities have survived in rather inhospitable circumstances for over a millennium. Though small in population percentage (about 2 per cent in China), their numbers are nevertheless large in comparison with other Muslim states (just over 20 million). For example, there are more Muslims in China than Malaysia, and more than every Middle Eastern Muslim nation except Iran, Turkey and Egypt. China is also increasingly dependent on mainly Muslim nations for energy and as an export market (one recent estimate suggests that China will be as dependent on Middle-East oil as Japan by 2050 according to current growth rates).[1] As

1. Keith Bradsher, "China wrestles with dependence on foreign oil," *International Herald Tribune*, 4 September 2002, p. 1.

Jonathan Lipman[2] noted, these long-term Muslim communities have often been the "familiar strangers" found in small enclaves throughout Asia. And if Kosovo and Bosnia are to serve as lessons, failure to accommodate Muslim minorities can lead to national dismemberment and international intervention. Indeed, China's primary objection to NATO involvement in Kosovo centred on its fear that this might encourage the aiding and abetting of separatists, with independence groups in Xinjiang, Tibet and perhaps Taiwan clearly a major Chinese concern. The US and China's pressure on the United Nations to include the ETIM group as a terrorist organization reflects this ongoing fear over Muslim activism in China.[3]

This article seeks to examine Islam as it relates to Muslim minority identity in China, not only because it is where this author has conducted most of his research, but also because with the largest Muslim minority in East Asia, China's Muslims are clearly the most threatened in terms of self-preservation and Islamic identity. Because of the history of Chinese state integration and the recognition of Muslims along national minority lines, it is necessary to examine Islam from the perspective of Muslim identity in the Chinese nation-state. Indeed, as Islam makes no distinction between state and church, or politics and religion, to discuss it in the abstract in China without reference to minority identity would be to ignore the way it is experienced and practised in the daily lives of Muslims today. I suggest, however, that the wide variety of Islamic practice among Muslims in China indicates that there is no monolithic Islam in China, though there are many basic tenets of Islam upon which all Muslims everywhere, and not just China, agree. Most relevant is the thesis put forth that successful Muslim accommodation to minority status in China can be seen to be a measure of the extent to which Muslim groups allow the reconciliation of the dictates of Islamic culture to their host culture. This goes against the opposite view that can be found in the writings of some analysts of Islam in China, such as Raphael Israeli and Michael Dillon, that Islam in the region is almost unavoidably rebellious and that Muslims as minorities are inherently problematic to a non-Muslim state.[4]

Islam in China

Islam in China has primarily been propagated over the last 1,300 years among the people now known as "Hui," but many of the issues confronting them are relevant to the Turkic and Indo-European Muslims on

2. Jonathan Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), p. 2.

3. For the controversy over this unitary US–China policy, see Erik Eckholm, "US labeling of group in China as terrorist is criticized," *New York Times*, 13 September 2002, p. 1; Charles Hutzler, "US gesture to China raises crackdown fears," *The Wall Street Journal*, 10 September 2002, p. 3.

4. See Raphael Israeli, *Muslims in China* (London & Atlantic Highlands: Curzon & Humanities Press, 1978), p. 7; and Michael Dillon, *Hui Muslims in China* (London: Curzon Press, 1997), pp. 2–8.

China's Inner Asian frontier. "Hui teaching" (*Hui jiao*) was the term once used in Chinese to indicate "Islam" in general, and probably derives from an early Chinese rendering of the term for the modern Uyghur people. Although the official nationality figures from the 2000 census are not yet published, initial estimates suggest that they do not differ substantially from 1990. According to the reasonably accurate 1990 national census of China, the total Muslim population is 17.6 million, including Hui (8,602,978), Uyghur (7,214,431), Kazakh (1,111,718), Dongxiang (373,872), Kyrgyz (373,872), Salar (87,697), Tajik (33,538), Uzbek (14,502), Bonan (12,212) and Tatar (4,873). The Hui speak mainly Sino-Tibetan languages; Turkic-language speakers include the Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tatar; combined Turkic-Mongolian speakers include the Dongxiang, Salar and Bonan, concentrated in Gansu's mountainous Hexi corridor; and the Tajik speak a variety of Indo-Persian dialects. It is important to note, however, that the Chinese census registered people by nationality, not religious affiliation, so the actual number of Muslims is still unknown, and all population figures are influenced by politics in their use and interpretation.

While the Hui have been labelled the "Chinese-speaking Muslims," "Chinese Muslims," and most recently, "Sino-Muslims,"[5] this is misleading, since by law all Muslims living in China are "Chinese" by citizenship, and there are large Hui communities who speak primarily the non-Chinese languages where they live, such as the Tibetan, Mongolian, Thai and Hainan Muslims, who are also classified by the State as Hui. These "Hui" Muslims speak Tibetan, Mongolian and Thai as their first languages, with Han Chinese the national language that they learn in school (having to learn Arabic and Persian, of course, in the mosque). Interestingly, since Tajik is not an official language in China, the Tajiks of Xinjiang (who speak a Daric branch language, distantly related to old Persian, and quite different from the Tajik languages spoken in Tajikistan), learn in either Turkic Uyghur or Han Chinese at school.

Nevertheless, it is true that compared to most other Muslim nationalities in China, most Hui are closer to the Han Chinese in terms of demographic proximity and cultural accommodation, adapting many of their Islamic practices to Han ways of life, which often became the source for many of the criticisms of the Muslim reformers. In the past, this was not as great a problem for the Turkish and Indo-European Muslim groups, as they were traditionally more isolated from the Han and their identities not as threatened, though this has begun to change in the last 40 years. As a result of state-sponsored nationality identification campaigns over the course of the last 30 years, these groups have begun to think of themselves more as ethnic nationalities, something more than just "Muslims." The Hui are unique among the 55 identified nationalities in China in that they are the only one for whom religion is the only unifying

5. For the debate over the definition of Hui and reference to them as "Sino-Muslims," see Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. xxiv

category of identity, even though many members of the Hui nationality may not practise Islam.

Resulting from a succession of Islamic reform movements that swept across China over the last 600 years, one finds among the Muslims in China today a wide spectrum of Islamic belief. Archaeological discoveries of large collections of Islamic artefacts and epigraphy on the south-east coast suggest that the earliest Muslim communities in China were descended from Arab, Persian, Central Asian and Mongolian Muslim merchants, militia and officials who settled first along China's south-east coast from the seventh to the tenth centuries, and then in larger migrations to the north from Central Asia under the Mongol-Yuan dynasty in the 13th and 14th centuries, gradually intermarrying with the local Chinese populations and raising their children as Muslims. Practising Sunni, Hanafi Islam, residing in independent small communities clustered around a central mosque, these communities were characterized by relatively isolated, independent Islamic villages and urban enclaves, who related with each other via trading networks and recognition of belonging to the wider Islamic "Umma," headed by an *Ahong* (from the Persian, *akhun[d]*) who was invited to teach on a more or less temporary basis.

Sufism began to make a substantial impact in China proper in the late 17th century, arriving mainly along the Central Asian trade routes with saintly *shaykhs*, both Chinese and foreign, who brought new teachings from the pilgrimage cities. These charismatic teachers and tradesmen established widespread networks and brotherhood associations, including most prominently the Naqshbandiyya, Qadariyya and Kubrawiyya. The hierarchical organization of these Sufi networks helped in the mobilization of large numbers of Hui during economic and political crises in the 17th to 19th centuries, assisting widespread Muslim-led rebellions and resistance movements against late Ming and Qing imperial rule in Yunnan, Shaanxi, Gansu and Xinjiang. The 1912 nationalist revolution allowed further autonomy in Muslim concentrated regions of the north-west, and wide areas came under virtual Muslim warlord control, leading to frequent intra-Muslim and Muslim–Han conflicts until the eventual communist victory led to the reassertion of central control. In the late 19th and early 20th century, Wahhabi-inspired reform movements, known as the Yihewani (from *Ikhwan*), rose to popularity under Nationalist and warlord sponsorship, and were noted for their critical stance towards traditionalist Islam as too acculturated to Chinese practices, and Sufism as too attached to saint and tomb veneration.

These movements of Islam influenced all Muslim nationalities in China today; however, they found their most political expression among the Hui who were faced with the task of accommodating each new Islamic movement with Chinese culture. Among the north-western Muslim communities, especially the Uyghur, their more recent integration into Chinese society as a result of Mongolian and Manchu expansion into Central Asian has forced them to reach social and political accommodations that have challenged their identity. In terms of integration, the Uyghur as a people are perhaps the least integrated into Chinese society, while the Hui

are at the other end of the spectrum, as a result of several historical and social factors that are discussed below.

Uyghur Indigeneity and the Challenge to Chinese Sovereignty

In 1997, bombs exploded in a city park in Beijing on 13 May (killing one) and on two buses on 7 March (killing two), as well as in the north-western border city of Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, on 25 February (killing nine), with over 30 other bombings, six in Tibet alone. Most of these are thought to have been related to demands by Muslim and Tibetan separatists. Eight members of the Uyghur Muslim minority were executed on 29 May 1997 for alleged bombings in north-west China, with hundreds arrested on suspicion of taking part in ethnic riots and engaging in separatist activities. Though sporadically reported since the early 1980s, such incidents have been increasingly common since 1997 and are documented in a recent scathing report on Chinese government policy in the region by Amnesty International.[6] A recent report in the *Wall Street Journal* of the arrest on 11 August 1999 of Rebiya Kadir, a well known Uyghur businesswoman, during a visit by the United States Congressional Research Service delegation to the region, indicates that China's random arrests have not diminished, nor is China concerned with Western criticism.[7]

To consider the interaction of Uyghur Muslims with Chinese society, three interrelated aspects of regional history, economy and politics must be examined. First, Chinese histories notwithstanding, every Uyghur firmly believes that their ancestors were the indigenous people of the Tarim basin, which did not become known in Chinese as "Xinjiang" ("new dominion") until the 18th century. Nevertheless, I have argued elsewhere the constructed "ethnogenesis" of the Uyghur, in which the current understanding of the indigeneity of the present people classified as Uyghur by the Chinese state is a quite recent phenomenon related to Great Game rivalries, Sino-Soviet geopolitical manoeuvrings, and Chinese nation-building.[8] While a collection of nomadic steppe peoples known as the "Uyghur" has existed since before the eighth century, this identity was lost from the 15th to the 20th centuries. It was not until the fall of the Turkish Khanate (552–744 CE) to a people reported by the Chinese historians as *Hui-he* or *Hui-hu* that we find the beginnings of the Uyghur Empire. At this time the Uyghur were but one collection of nine nomadic tribes, who initially, in confederation with other Basmil and Karlukh nomads, defeated the Second Turkish Khanate and then dominated the federation under the leadership of Koli Beile in 742.

Gradual sedentarization of the Uyghur, and their defeat of

6. Amnesty International, *Peoples Republic of China: Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region* (London, 21 April 1999).

7. Ian Johnson, "China arrests noted businesswoman in crackdown in Muslim region," *Wall Street Journal*, 18 August 1999.

8. Dru C. Gladney, "The ethnogenesis of the Uighur," *Central Asian Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1990), p. 3.

the Turkish Khanate, occurred precisely as trade with the unified Tang state became especially lucrative. This was accompanied by socio-religious change: the traditional shamanistic Turkic-speaking Uyghur came increasingly under the influence of Persian Manichaeanism, Buddhism and eventually Nestorian Christianity. Extensive trade and military alliances along the old Silk Road with the Chinese state developed to the extent that the Uyghur gradually adopted the cultural, dress and even agricultural practices of the Chinese. Conquest of the Uyghur capital of Karabalghasun in Mongolia by the nomadic Kyrgyz in 840, without rescue from the Tang, who may have become by then intimidated by the wealthy Uyghur empire, led to further sedentarization and crystallization of Uyghur identity. One branch that ended up in what is now Turpan took advantage of the unique socio-ecology of the glacier-fed oases surrounding the Taklamakan and were able to preserve their merchant and limited agrarian practices, gradually establishing Khocho or Gaochang, the great Uyghur city-state based in Turpan for four centuries (850–1250).

The Islamicization of the Uyghur from the tenth to as late as the 17th century, while displacing their Buddhist religion, did little to bridge these oases-based loyalties. From that time on, the people of "Uyghuristan" centred in Turpan who resisted Islamic conversion until the 17th century were the last to be known as Uyghur. The others were known only by their oasis or by the generic term of "Turki." With the arrival of Islam, the ethnonym "Uyghur" fades from the historical record. It was not until 1760 that the Manchu Qing dynasty exerted full and formal control over the region, establishing it as their "new dominions" (*Xinjiang*), an administration that lasted barely 100 years when it fell to the Yakub Beg rebellion (1864–1877) and expanding Russian influence.[9] The end of the Qing dynasty and the rise of Great Game rivalries between China, Russia and Britain saw the region torn by competing loyalties and marked by two short-lived and drastically different attempts at an independence: the proclamations of an "East Turkestan Republic" in Kashgar in 1933 and another in Yining (Ghulje) in 1944.[10] As Andrew Forbes has noted, these rebellions and attempts at self-rule did little to bridge competing political, religious and regional differences within the Turkic people who became known as the Uyghur in 1934 under successive Chinese KMT warlord administrations.[11] Justin Rudelson's recent work suggests there is persistent regional diversity along three, and perhaps four macro-regions: the north-western Zungharia plateau, the southern Tarim basin, the south-west Pamir region and the eastern Kumul–Turpan–Hami corridor.[12] The recognition of the Uyghur as an official Chinese "nationality" (*minzu*) in the

9. For the best treatment of the Yakub Beg rebellion, see Kim Ho-dong, "The Muslim rebellion of the Kashgar Emirate in Chinese Central Asia, 1864–1877," PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1986

10. Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944–1949* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990).

11. Andrew D. W., Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 29.

12. Justin Jon Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China's Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 40–45.

1930s in Xinjiang under a Soviet-influenced policy of nationality recognition contributed to a widespread acceptance today of continuity with the ancient Uyghur kingdom and their eventual "ethnogenesis" as a *bona fide* nationality. The "nationality" policy under the KMT identified five peoples of China, with the Han in the majority. This policy was continued under the Communists, who eventually recognized 56 nationalities, with the Han occupying a 91 per cent majority in 1990.

The "peaceful liberation" by the Chinese Communists of Xinjiang in 1949, and its subsequent establishment as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on 1 October 1955, perpetuated the Nationalist policy of recognizing the Uyghur as a minority nationality under Chinese rule. This nationality designation not only masks tremendous regional and linguistic diversity, it also includes groups such as the Loplyk and Dolans who had very little to do with the oasis-based Turkic Muslims who became known as the Uyghur. At the same time, contemporary Uyghur separatists look back to the brief periods of independent self-rule under Yakub Beg and the Eastern Turkestan Republics, in addition to the earlier glories of the Uyghur kingdoms in Turpan and Karabalghasan, as evidence of their rightful claims to the region. Contemporary Uyghur separatist organizations based in Istanbul, Ankara, Almaty, Munich, Amsterdam, Melbourne and Washington, DC, may differ on their political goals and strategies for the region, but they all share a common vision of a unilineal Uyghur claim on the region, disrupted by Chinese and Soviet intervention. The independence of the former Soviet Central Asian Republics in 1991 has done much to encourage these Uyghur organizations in their hopes for an independent "Turkestan," despite the fact the new, mainly Muslim Central Asian governments all signed protocols with China in the spring of 1996 that they would not harbour or support separatist groups.

Within the region, though many portray the Uyghur as united around separatist or Islamist causes, they continue to be divided from within by religious conflicts, in this case competing Sufi and non-Sufi factions, territorial loyalties (whether they be oases or places of origin), linguistic discrepancies, commoner–elite alienation and competing political loyalties. These divided loyalties were evidenced by the attack in May 1996 on the Imam of the Idgah Mosque in Kashgar by other Uyghurs, as well as the assassination of at least six Uyghur officials in September 2001. It is also important to note that Islam was only one of several unifying markers for Uyghur identity, depending on those with whom they were in co-operation at the time. For example, to the Hui Muslim Chinese, the Uyghur distinguish themselves as the legitimate autochthonous minority, since both share a belief in Sunni Islam. In contrast to the nomadic Muslim peoples (Kazakh or Kyrgyz), Uyghur might stress their attachment to the land and oases of origin. In opposition to the Han Chinese, the Uyghur will generally emphasize their long history in the region. This suggests that Islamic fundamentalist groups such as the Taliban in Afghanistan (often glossed as "Wahhabiyya" in the region) will have only limited appeal among the Uyghur. It is this contested understanding of history that continues to

influence much of the current debate over separatist and Chinese claims to the region.

Amnesty International has claimed that the round-ups of so-called terrorists and separatists have led to hurried public trials and immediate, summary executions of possibly thousands of locals. One Amnesty International estimate suggested that in a country known for its frequent executions, Xinjiang had the highest number, averaging 1.8 per week, most of them Uyghur. Troop movements to the area, related to the nation-wide campaign against crime known as "Strike Hard" launched in 1998 that includes the call to erect a "great wall of steel" against separatists in Xinjiang, have reportedly been the largest since the suppression of the large Akto insurrection in April 1990 (the first major uprising in Xinjiang that took place in the Southern Tarim region near Baren Township, which initiated a series of unrelated and sporadic protests). Alleged incursions of Taliban fighters through the Wakhan corridor into China where Xinjiang shares a narrow border with Afghanistan have led to the area being swamped with Chinese security forces and large military exercises, beginning at least one month prior to the 11 September attack, and suggesting growing government concern about these border areas. Under US and Chinese pressure, Pakistan returned one Uyghur activist to China, apprehended among hundreds of Taliban detainees, which follows a pattern of repatriations of suspected Uyghur separatists in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

International campaigns for Uyghur rights and possible independence have become increasingly vocal and well organized, especially on the internet. Repeated public appeals have been made to Abdulahat Abdurixit, the Uyghur People's Government Chairman of Xinjiang in Urumqi. Notably, the elected chair of the Unrepresented Nations and People's Organization (UNPO) based in the Hague is a Uyghur, Erkin Alptekin, son of the separatist leader, Isa Yusuf Alptekin, who is buried in Istanbul where there is a park dedicated to his memory. Supporting primarily an audience of approximately 1 million expatriate Uyghurs (yet few Uyghurs in Central Asia and China have access to these internet sites) there are at least 25 international organizations and websites working for the independence of "Eastern Turkestan," and based in Amsterdam, Munich, Istanbul, Melbourne, Washington, DC and New York. Since 11 September, each of these organizations has disclaimed any support for violence or terrorism, pressing for a peaceful resolution of ongoing conflicts in the region. The growing influence of "cyber-separatism" and international popularization of the Uyghur cause concerns Chinese authorities, who hope to convince the world that the Uyghurs do pose a real domestic and international terrorist threat.

The second pressing issue is economic. Since 1991, China has been a net oil importer. It also has 20 million Muslims. Mishandling of its Muslim problems will alienate trading partners in the Middle East, who are primarily Muslims. Already, after an ethnic riot on 5 February 1997 in the north-western Xinjiang city of Yining that left at least nine Uyghur Muslims dead and several hundreds arrested, the Saudi Arabian official

newspaper *al-Bilad* warned China about the "suffering of [its] Muslims whose human rights are violated." Turkey's Defence Minister, Turhan Tayan, officially condemned China's handling of the issue, and China responded by telling Turkey to not interfere in China's internal affairs. Muslim nations on China's borders, including the new Central Asian states, Pakistan and Afghanistan, though officially unsupportive of Uyghur separatists, may be increasingly critical of harsh treatment extended to fellow Turkic and/or Muslim co-religionists in China.

Unrest in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region may lead to a decline in outside oil investment and revenues that are already operating at a loss. Recently, Exxon reported that its two wells came up dry in China's supposedly oil-rich Tarim basin of southern Xinjiang, with the entire region yielding only 3.15 million metric tons of crude oil, much less than China's overall output of 156 million tons. The World Bank lends over $3 billion a year to China, investing over $780.5 million in 15 projects in the Xinjiang Region alone, with some of that money allegedly going to the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) that human rights activist Harry Wu has claimed employs prison *laogai* labour. International companies and organizations, from the World Bank to Exxon, may not wish to subject their employees and investors to social and political upheavals. As a result of these criticisms, many Bank and ADB projects have been curtailed in recent years.

China's trade with Central Asia is expanding at a rapid rate, with the opening of direct rail, air and six overland links since 1991. Energy economist James P. Dorian has noted that Xinjiang's trade with Central Asia increased from $463 million in 1992 to $775 million in 1996. The end of 1992 saw an increase of 130 per cent in cross-border trade, with Kazakhstan benefiting the most. China is now Kazakhstan's fifth largest trade partner. Xinjiang's top three trading partners are Kazakhstan, Xinjiang and Hong Kong, with China–Kazakhstan trade alone totalling more than Turkey's trade with all of Central Asia.[13] Additionally, China is hoping to increase revenues from tourism to the region, marketing it as an important link on the ancient Silk Road. It has been a tremendous draw to foreign Muslim tourists, as well as Japanese, Taiwanese, South-East Asian and domestic tourists, with touristic development assisting the establishment of five-star hotels throughout the region, including the Holiday Inn in Urumqi. Economic development in Urumqi alone has witnessed 80 new skyscrapers in the last ten years.

It is clear that Uyghur separatism or Muslim complaints regarding Chinese policy will have important consequences for Chinas economic development of the region. Tourists and foreign businessmen will certainly avoid areas with ethnic strife and terrorist activities. China will continue to use its economic leverage with its Central Asian neighbours and Russia to prevent such disruptions.

13. James P. Dorian, Brett Wigdortz and Dru Gladney, "Central Asia and Xinjiang, China: emerging energy, economic, and ethnic relations," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1997), p. 466.

The third aspect is political. China's international relations with its bordering nations and internal regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet have become increasingly important not only for the economic reasons discussed above but also for China's desire to participate in international organizations such as the World Trade Organization and Asia-Pacific Economic Council. Though Tibet is no longer of any real strategic or substantial economic value to China, it is politically important to China's current leadership to indicate that they will not submit to foreign pressure and withdraw their iron hand from Tibet. Uyghurs have begun to work closely with Tibetans internationally to put political pressure on China in international fora. In an 7 April 1997 interview by this author in Istanbul with Ahmet Türköz, vice-director of the Eastern Turkestan Foundation that works for an independent Uyghur homeland, Mr Türköz noted that since 1981, meetings had been taking place between the Dalai Lama and Uyghur leaders, initiated by the deceased Uyghur nationalist Isa Yusup Alptekin. These international fora cannot force China to change its policy, any more than the annual debate in the US over the renewal of China's Most-Favoured Nation status. Nevertheless, they continue to influence China's ability to co-operate internationally. As a result, China has sought to respond rapidly, and often militarily, to domestic ethnic affairs that might have international implications.

As China goes through the process of reintegrating Hong Kong since 1997 with the hope of eventually reuniting with Taiwan, residents of Hong Kong will be watching how China deals with other problems of national integration. During the Dalai Lama's March 1998 visit to Taiwan, he again renounced independence, calling for China to consider Tibet under the same "two systems, one country" policy as Hong Kong, yet *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*) continued to call him a "separatist." Taiwan will certainly be watching how well Hong Kong is integrated into China as a Special Administrative Region with a true separate system of government, as opposed to Tibet and Xinjiang, which as so-called Autonomous Regions have very little actual autonomy from decision-makers in Beijing. China's handling of ethnic and integrationist issues in Xinjiang and Hong Kong will have a direct bearing on its possible reunification with Taiwan.

In addition, outside the official minorities, China possesses tremendous ethnic, linguistic and regional diversity. Intolerance towards difference in Xinjiang might be extended to limiting cultural pluralism in Guangdong, where at least 15 dialects of Cantonese are spoken and folk religious practice is rampant. Memories are strong of the repressions of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), when all forms of diversity, political or cultural, were severely curtailed. If rising Chinese nationalism entails reducing ethnic and cultural difference, then anyone who is regarded as "other" in China will suffer, not just the Uyghurs.

Hui Muslims and Islamic Accommodation to Chinese Society

Islam in China has primarily been propagated over the last 1,300 years

among the people now known as Hui. Yet many of the issues confronting them are relevant to the Turkic and Indo-European Muslims on China's Inner Asian frontier. Though Hui speak a number of non-Chinese languages, most Hui are closer to Han Chinese than other Muslim nationalities in terms of demographic proximity and cultural accommodation. The attempt to adapt many of their Muslim practices to the Han way of life has led to criticisms amongst Muslim reformers. The Hui are unique among the 55 identified nationalities in China in that they are the only one for whom religion (Islam) is the only unifying category of identity, even though many members of the Hui nationality may not practise Islam. As a result of Islamic reform movements that have swept across China, the Hui continue to subscribe to a wide spectrum of Islamic belief.

Many Muslims supported the earliest communist call for equality, autonomy, freedom of religion and recognized nationality status, and were active in the early establishment of the People's Republic of China. However, many became disenchanted by growing critiques of religious practice during several periods in the PRC beginning in 1957. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), Muslims became the focus for both anti-religious and anti-ethnic nationalism critiques, leading to widespread persecutions, mosque closings and at least one large massacre of 1,000 Hui following a 1975 uprising in Yunnan province. Since Deng Xiaoping's post-1978 reforms, Muslims have sought to take advantage of liberalized economic and religious policies, while keeping a watchful eye on the ever-swinging pendulum of Chinese radical politics. There are now more mosques open in China than there were prior to 1949, and Muslims travel freely on the Hajj to Mecca, as well as engaging in cross-border trade with co-religionists in Central Asia, the Middle East and increasingly South-East Asia.

Increasing Muslim political activism on a national scale and rapid state response indicates the growing importance Beijing attaches to Muslim-related issues. In 1986 Uygurs in Xinjiang marched through the streets of Urumqi protesting against a wide range of issues, including the environmental degradation of the Zungharian plain, nuclear testing in the Taklamakan, increased Han immigration to Xinjiang and ethnic insults at Xinjiang University. Muslims throughout China protested against the publication of a Chinese book *Sexual Customs* in May 1989, and a children's book in October 1993, that portrayed Muslims, particularly their restriction against pork, in a derogatory fashion. In each case, the government responded quickly, meeting most of the Muslims' demands, condemning the publications and arresting the authors, and closing down the printing houses.

Islamic factional struggles continue to divide China's Muslims internally, especially as increased travel to the Middle East prompts criticism of Muslim practices at home and exposes China's Muslims to new, often politically radical, Islamic ideals. In February 1994, four Naqshbandi Sufi leaders were sentenced to long-term imprisonment for their support of internal factional disputes in the southern Ningxia region that had led to

at least 60 deaths on both sides and People's Liberation Army intervention. Throughout the summer and autumn of 1993 bombs exploded in several towns in Xinjiang, indicating the growing demands of organizations pressing for an "independent Turkestan." In February 1997, a major uprising in Ili led to the deaths of at least 13 Uyghur and the arrest of hundreds. Beijing has responded with increased military presence, particularly in Kashghar and Urumqi, as well as diplomatic efforts in the Central Asian states and Turkey to discourage foreign support for separatist movements. It is clear that Hui and Kazakh Muslims are critical of these separatist actions among the Uyghur, but it is not yet clear how much support even among the Uyghur there is for the violent acts, especially one recent attempt to assassinate a "collaborating" Imam in Kashgar. At the same time, cross-border trade between Xinjiang and Central Asia has grown tremendously, especially since the reopening in 1991 of the Eurasian Railroad linking Urumqi and Alma Ata with markets in China and Eastern Europe. Overland travel between Xinjiang and Pakistan, Tajikstan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan has also increased dramatically with the relaxation of travel restrictions based on Deng Xiaoping's giving priority to trade over security interests in the area. The government's policy of seeking to buy support through stimulating the local economy seems to be working at the present. Income levels in Xinjiang are often far higher than those across the border, yet increased Han migration to participate in the region's lucrative oil and mining industries continues to exacerbate ethnic tensions. Muslim areas in northern and central China, however, continue to be left behind as China's rapid economic growth expands unevenly, enriching the southern coastal areas far beyond that of the interior.

While further restricting Islamic freedoms in the border regions, at the same time China has become more keenly aware of the importance foreign Muslim governments place on its treatment of its Muslim minorities as a factor in its lucrative trade and military agreements. The establishment of full diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia in 1991 and increasing military and technical trade with Middle Eastern Muslim states enhances the economic and political salience of China's treatment of its internal Muslim minority population. The official protocols signed with China's Central Asian border nations beginning in 1996 with the group known as the "Shanghai 5" (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikstan) and expanded in 2001 to include Uzbekistan (as the Shanghai Co-operative Organization), underlines China's growing role in the region and concerns over transnational trade and security. The increased transnationalism of China's Muslims will be an important factor in their ethnic expression as well as practised accommodation to Chinese culture and state authority.

Islam and Chinese Nationalism

Increased Muslim activism in China cannot but be nationalistic, yet a nationalism that may often transcend the boundaries of the contemporary

nation-state, via mass communications, increased travel and the internet. Earlier Islamic movements in China were precipitated by China's opening to the outside world. No matter what conservative leaders in the government might wish, China's Muslims politics have reached a new stage of openness. If China wants to participate in an international political sphere of nation-states, this is unavoidable. With the opening to the West in recent years, travel to and from the Islamic heartlands has dramatically increased in China. In 1984, over 1,400 Muslims left China to go on the Hajj. This number increased to over 2,000 in 1987, representing a return to pre-1949 levels, and in the late 1990s, official Hajj numbers regularly surpassed 6,000, with many others travelling in private capacities through third countries. Several Hui students are presently enrolled in Islamic and Arabic studies at the Al-Azhar University in Egypt, with many others seeking Islamic training abroad.

Encouraged by the Chinese state, relations between Muslims in China and the Middle East are becoming stronger and more frequent, partly from a desire to establish trading partners for arms, commodities and currency exchanges, and partly by China's traditional view of itself as a leader of the Third World. Delegations of foreign Muslims regularly travel to prominent Islamic sites in China, in a kind of state-sponsored religious tourism, and donations are encouraged. While the state hopes that private Islamic investment will assist economic development, the vast majority of grants by visiting foreign Muslims have been donated to the rebuilding of Islamic mosques, schools and hospitals. As Hui in China are further exposed to Islamic internationalism, and they return from studies and pilgrimages abroad, traditional Hui identities will once again be reshaped and called into question, giving rise to new manifestations of Islam in China. Global Islam is thus localized into Hui Islam, finding its expression as a range of accommodations between Chineseness and Muslimness as defined in each local community.

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Internal Conversion

While Islamic associations are as confusing to the non-initiate as are the numerous schools of Buddhist thought in China, they differ in that membership in them is hotly disputed in China. Unlike Middle Eastern or Central Asian Islamic orders, where one might belong to two or even three brotherhoods at once, the Hui belong to only one. Among the Hui,

one is generally born into one's Islamic order, or converts dramatically to another. In fact, this is the only instance of conversion I encountered among my sojourn among the Hui. I never met a Han who had converted to Islam in China without having been married to a Hui or adopted into a Hui family, though I heard of a few isolated instances. Fletcher records the conversion of 28 Tibetan tribes as well as their "Living Buddha" by Ma Laichi in Xunhua, Qinghai in the mid 18th century.[14] After the 1784 Ma Mingxin uprising, the Qing government forbade non-Muslims from converting to Islam, which may have had some influence on the few recorded Han conversions. This goes against the common assumption that Islam in China was spread through proselytization and conversion. Islamic preachers in China, including Ma Laichi, Ma Mingxin, Qi Jingyi and Ma Qixi, spent most of their time trying to convert other Muslims. Islam in China for the most part has grown biologically through birth and intermarriage.

Hui Islamic Orders and Chinese Culture

The tensions and conflicts that led to the rise and divisions of the Sufi *menhuan* in north-west China, and subsequent non-Sufi reforms, are impossible to enumerate in their complexity. They give evidence, however, of the ongoing struggles that continue to make Islam meaningful to Hui Muslims. These tensions between Islamic ideals and social realities are often left unresolved. Their very dynamism derives from the questions they raise and the doubts they engender among people struggling with traditional meanings in the midst of changing social contexts. Questions of purity and legitimacy become paramount when the Hui are faced with radical internal socio-economic and political change, and exposed to different interpretations of Islam from the outside Muslim world. These conflicts and reforms reflect an ongoing debate in China over Islamic orthodoxy, revealing an important disjunction between "scripturalist" and "mystical" interpretations.

In a similar fashion, the study of South-East Asian Islam has often centred on the contradiction and compromise between the native culture of the indigenous Muslims and the *sharīʿa* of orthodox Islam, the mystical and scriptural, the real and the ideal.[15] The supposed accommodation of orthodox Islamic tenets to local cultural practices has led scholars to dismiss or explain such compromise as syncretism, assimilation and "sinification," as has been described among the Hui. An alternative approach, and one perhaps more in tune with the interests of Hui themselves, sees this incongruence as the basis for ongoing dialectical tensions that have often led to reform movements and conflicts within

14. See Trippner, "Islamische Gruppe und Graberkult in Nordwest China" ("Muslim groups and grave-cults in north-west China"), *Die Welt des Islams*, No. 7 (1961), pp. 154–55.

15. This distinction was most fully articulated by William Roff, "Islam obscured? Some reflections on studies of Islam and society in Asia," *L'Islam en Indonesie* Vol. 1, No. 29 (1985), pp. 8–10.

Muslim communities.[16] Following Max Weber,[17] one can see the wide variety of Islamic expression as reflecting processes of local world construction and programmes for social conduct whereby a major religious tradition becomes meaningful to an indigenous society.

In the competition for scarce resources, these conflicts are also prompted by and expressed in economic concerns, such as the example of the non-Sufi *Xi Dao Tang* who were defeated by the Sufi Khufiyya – clearly a case of coveting his Muslim brother's wealth. Fletcher notes that one of the criticisms of the Khufiyya was that their recitation of the *Ming Sha Le* took less time than the normal Quranic suras by non-Sufi clergy, and therefore their Imams were cheaper to hire at ritual ceremonies. He suggests that this assisted their rise in popularity and criticism by the Gedimu religious leaders.[18] The Yihewani criticized both the Gedimus and Sufis for only performing rituals in believers' homes for profit, and advocated the practice, "If you recite, do not eat; if you eat, do not recite" (*nian jing bu chi, chi bu nian jing*). The Chinese state has generally found economic reasons for criticizing certain Islamic orders among the Hui. During the Land Reform campaigns of the 1950s, which appropriate mosque and *wagf* (Islamic endowment) holdings, they met great resistance from the Sufi *menhuan* which had accumulated a great deal due to their hierarchical centralized leadership. In a 1958 document criticizing Ma Zhenwu, the Jahriyya Sufi shaykh, the following accusations are quite revealing:

> According to these representatives, Ma Chen-wu instituted many "A-mai-lis," or festival days to commemorate the dead ancestors to which the A-hungs must be invited to chant the scriptures and be treated with big feasts, thereby squeezing money out of the living for the dead. For example, he has kept a record of the days of birth and death of all the family members of his followers and has seen to it that religious services be held on such days. These include "Grandmother's Day," "Wife's Day," "Aunt's Day," and others, sixty-five of such "A-mai-lis" in a year. On the average, one such "A-mai-li" is held every six or seven days, among which are seven occasions of big festival ... All the A-hungs of the Islamic mosques have been appointed by Ma Chen-wu. Through the appointment of A-hungs he has squeezed a big sum of money ... Ma has regularly, in the name of repairing the "kung-peis" [tombs], squeezed the Hui people for money.[19]

The tensions arising from the conflict of Chinese cultural practices and Islamic ideals have led to the rise and powerful appeal of Islamic movements among Hui Muslims. One way of looking at this tension between cultural practice and Islamic ideals I explored in an earlier

16. See Dale F. Eickelman, *Moroccan Islam: Tradition And Society In A Pilgrimage Center* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1976), pp. 10–13.

17. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

18. Joseph Fletcher, *Studies on Chinese and Islamic Inner Asia* (London: Varorum Press, 1996), p. 21.

19. Quoted in Donald E. MacInnis, *Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China* (New York: MacMillan, 1972), pp. 171–72.

work.[20] In China there were many attempts to reconcile Chinese culture with Islam, leading to a range of alternatives. At one extreme there are those who reject any integration of Islam with Chinese culture, such as Ma Wanfu's return to an Arabicized "pure" Islam. Conversely, at the other extreme, there are those leaders of the Gedimu, such as Hu Dengzhou, who accepted more integration with traditional Chinese society. Likewise, Ma Qixi's *Xi Dao Tang* stressed the complete compatibility of Chinese and Islamic culture, the importance of Chinese Islamic Confucian texts, the harmony of the two systems, and the reading of the Quran in Chinese.

In between, one finds various attempts at changing Chinese society to "fit" a Muslim world, through transformationist or militant Islam, as illustrated by the largely Naqshbandiyya-led 19th-century Hui uprisings. The Jahriyya sought to implement an alternative vision of the world in their society, and this posed a threat to the Qing as well as to other Hui Muslims, earning them the label of "heterodox" (*xie jiao*) and persecution by the Chinese state. By contrast, other Hui reformers have attempted throughout history to make Islam "fit" Chinese society, such as Liu Zhi's monumental effort to demonstrate the Confucian morality of Islam. The Qadiriyya alternative represents resolution of this tension through ascetic withdrawal from the world. Qi Jingyi advocated an inner mystical journey where the dualism of Islam and the Chinese world is absolved through grasping the oneness of Allah found inside every believer. These various approaches represent socio-historical attempts to deal with the relationship of relating the world religion of Islam to the local Chinese realm.

Another way to examine this range of alternatives is to generalize about the Muslim nationalities themselves. In this scheme, the Uyghur can be seen to be much more resistant to accepting integration into Chinese society than other Muslim groups, in that they are the only Muslim minority in China expressing strong desires for a separate state (Uyghuristan) – although it is not at all clear that all Uyghur desire independence. At the other extreme, it could be argued that the Hui are the most integrated of all the Muslim minorities into Chinese society and culture. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage in that they often have greater access to power and resources within Chinese society, but at the same time risk either the loss of their identity or the rejection of other Muslim groups in China as being too assimilated into Chinese society, to the detriment of Islam. In between there is a range of Muslim nationalities who are closer to the Uyghur in resisting Chinese culture and maintaining a distinct language and identity (Uzbeks, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Tajiks), and those who are much closer to the Hui in accommodation to Chinese culture (Dongxiang and Bonan). While much of this is due to historical interaction and locale, it can be a heuristic way of examining

20. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 75. This interpretive scheme is influenced by H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

the challenges faced by each Muslim minority in their daily expression of identity and Islam in Chinese society. Here, it must be clearly noted, however, that there are many exceptions to this overly generalized pattern, for example Uyghur (such as Party officials and secularists) who are quite integrated into Chinese society, and Hui (such as religious Imams and rebellious youths) who might live their lives in strident resistance to Chinese culture.

Ethnic Muslim Nationalism in an Age of Globalization

China is not immune to the new tide of ethnic nationalism and "primordial politics" sweeping Europe, Africa and Asia in the post-Cold War period. Much of it is clearly due to a response to globalization in terms of localization: increasing nationalism arising from the organization of the world into nation-states. No longer content to sit on the sidelines, the nations within these states are playing a greater role in the public sphere, which Jürgen Habermas suggests is the defining characteristic of civil society in the modern nation-state.[21] In most of these nationalist movements, religion, culture and racialization play a privileged role in defining the boundaries of the nation. In China, Islam will continue to play an important role in debates about the nation, especially in countries where nationality is defined by a mix of religion and ethnicity. These accommodations of China's Muslims are not unlike those made on a daily basis among other Muslim minorities in Asia and in the West. The only difference may be the increasingly post-modern contraction of time and space: accommodations that took over a millennia in China are now being required of Muslim diasporic communities in a matter of hours or days. For Muslims in China, Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers in Tokyo and Seoul, and the other wider diaspora, Muslims may be becoming increasingly "unfamiliar" strangers. If the "war on terrorism" widens to divide the West and China against Muslim communities in general, one can expect the Muslims in China will be increasingly regarded as a threat to state rule and social integration. This does not bode well for the future integration of Muslims into the Chinese leviathan.

21. Jürgen Habermas, tr. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989 (1st ed. 1962).